

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A computer-implemented project development system, comprising:
a computer coupled for inter-communication to a plurality of stations from which respective users each have a browser-based interface with the computer, wherein the computer includes:
project idea managing software operational when executed by a processor to direct the processor to perform the following tasks:
receive idea information describing a proposed new project;
store information in a database on the proposed new project;
search for information on previous proposed projects stored in a database based on an inputted search request by a user, and
evaluate the proposed new project using criteria including the search results for information on previously proposed projects to generate an evaluation document.
2. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, wherein the information is stored in an electronic file form that is key-word searchable and retrievable.
3. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, wherein the information is stored in an electronic file form under categories of business that are key-word searchable and retrievable.
4. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, further comprising authenticating means for differentiating between external users and internal users, and controlling access of a given user to system resources based on the authenticating data supplied by the user when logging on.

5. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, further comprising cookie means for developing a user profile of users.
6. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, further comprising a graphical user interface providing contextual help for users displayed as pop-up or scroll in thumbnail windows appearing on the user's display screen when a user moves a cursor arrow over and rests it on a button or heading in the screen.
7. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, further comprising means for built-in e-mail functionality capability using internet e-mail in which e-mail documents can be separately sent or received by a user without the user needing to back out of the current screen being viewed.
8. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, further comprising means for permitting a user to select a name(s) of desired team member recipients of e-mail in a window without having to scroll out of a screen to send the e-mail.
9. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, further comprising means for displaying project report as printable browser-based documents.
10. The computer-implemented project development system of claim 1, further comprising means displaying customized display screens for managerial review providing overview information for projects underway on the system.
11. A computer-implemented project development system, comprising:
a computer coupled for inter-communication to a plurality of stations from which respective users each have a browser-based interface with the computer, wherein the computer includes:

project idea managing software operational when executed by a processor to direct the processor to perform the following tasks:

- receive idea information describing a proposed new project;
- store information in a database on the proposed new project;
- search for information on previous proposed projects stored in

a database based on an inputted search request by a user, and

- evaluate the proposed new project using criteria including the search results for information on previously proposed projects to generate an evaluation document;

- receive technical feasibility information and process the technical feasibility information to generate a technical feasibility document;

- receive risk assessment information and process the risk assessment information to generate a risk assessment document;

- receive information on projected project timelines for tasks required to reach market introduction;

- receive information on task assignments to personnel and associated timelines for completing them;

- generate a product proposal plan upon receiving at least portion of the idea evaluation information, technical feasibility information, risk assessment information, and projected timelines for the tasks required to reach market introduction information;

- receive information on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the product proposal plan;

business planning software operational when executed by the processor to direct the processor to receive business planning information and process the business planning information to generate a business proposition and a capital allocation request, and to receive and process information on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the business proposition and the capital allocation request; and

project launching software operational when executed by the processor to direct the processor to receive overall finalized product information

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the project idea managing software is operational to direct the processor to further perform, between the tasks of receiving the technical feasibility and risk assessment information, a task of receiving and processing consumer feedback information obtained via surveying potential customers on the concept of the proposed project.

14. The system of claim 11, wherein the business planning software is operational to direct the processor to further perform a task of receiving and processing consumer testing information on product prototypes associated with the new project.

16. The system of claim 11, wherein the project launching software is operational to direct the processor to further perform tasks of receiving and processing initial production plant information, and to receive and process information on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the initial production plant information.

17. The system of claim 11, wherein the project launching software is

operational to direct the processor to further perform tasks of receiving and processing resource release information to generate a resource release document, and to receive and process information on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the resource release.

18. The system of claim 11, wherein at least one of the work stations comprises a desktop computer, a laptop computer, a computer terminal, or an Internet appliance.

19. The system of claim 11, further including a database including memory storing identification, task assignment, scheduling and outcome information on previously proposed projects and newly proposed projects, wherein said database is associated with a web server, and the browser-enabled stations being operable to communicate a request to the server to access said project information, and the server being operable, upon receipt of the request, to retrieve and pass the requested information to station to be displayed by the browser.

20. The system of claim 11, including browser software residing on the stations, and said computer including a web server through which users enter a web home page or portal for the system upon sending a system URL via HTTP to the web server.

21. The system of claim 11, further comprising task control software operational to permit an administrator of the project to make additions, changes or deletions in the task assignments during implementation of a project on the system.

22. The system of claim 11, further comprising task control software operational to permit an administrator of the project to make changes in timelines associated with task assignments during implementation of a project on the system.

23. The system of claim 11, further comprising task control software operational to permit an administrator of the project to select from among optional task assignments during the receiving of the information on task assignments.

24. The system of claim 11, further comprising task control software operational to permit an administrator of the project to add task assignments after the receiving of the information on task assignments and during implementation of a project on the system.

25. The system of claim 11, further comprising document storing and retrieval software for maintaining documents generated during project development which are applicable to given tasks.

26. The system of claim 11, further comprising document storing and retrieval software for maintaining document templates applicable to tasks.

27. The system of claim 11, further comprising project information generating software for displaying task information and timelines on a browser-enabled user station for a selected project.

28. The system of claim 11, further comprising project information generating software for displaying task information and timelines on a browser-enabled user station for a selected project, further including electronic mail software providing an interface with electronic mail associated with the selected project.

29. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing a method of operating an automated computer based product development system comprising a web server in inter-communication with browser-enabled user stations, the method comprising:

receiving idea information describing a proposed new project into the

storing information in a database on the proposed new project into the computer;

evaluating the proposed new project based upon a comparison of the search results for information retrieved on previously proposed projects with the newly proposed project;

processing the technical feasibility information to generate a technical feasibility document;

processing the risk assessment information to generate a risk assessment document;

receiving information on task assignments for personnel and associated timelines for completing them;

receiving information into the computer on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the product proposal plan;

processing the business planning information to generate a business proposition and a capital allocation request;

receiving product launch information, if the business proposition and capital

allocation request are approved, into the computer;

processing the product launch information to generate a plant approval request and a resource release request; and

receiving information into the computer on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the plant approval request and the resource release request.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein said evaluating step further comprises assigning at least one person responsible for conducting the comparison of the electronic search results for information retrieved on previously proposed projects with the newly proposed project, and receiving information into the computer indicating whether the proposed new project is accepted or not-accepted based on said comparison.

31. The method of claim 29, further comprising, between the steps of processing the technical feasibility information and receiving risk assessment information into the computer, receiving and processing consumer feedback information obtained via surveying potential customers on the concept of the proposed project.

32. The method of claim 29, further comprising, between the steps of processing the technical feasibility information and receiving risk assessment into the computer, receiving and processing input forecast of potential volume of said new project.

33. The method of claim 29, wherein said receiving of business information into the computer includes receiving information on product prototypes associated with the new project.

34. The method of claim 29, wherein said receiving of product launching information includes receiving customer authorization information for product

35. The method of claim 29, wherein said receiving of product launching information includes receiving initial production plant information.

37. The method of claim 29, further comprising, after the receiving of information on task assignments and associated timelines for completing them, receiving information from an administrator of the project making additions, changes or deletions in the task assignments during implementation of a project on the system.

39. The method of claim 29, further comprising sending electronic mail to personnel regarding the status of the task assignments during project development.

40. A method for automating a project development system, comprising:
planning a plurality of project development phases for said project development, wherein said project development phases are capable of being displayed on display units of a plurality of browser-based clients of a computer system, and said clients each comprising a browser operable to communicate with a server which can retrieve stored information on previously submitted projects from computer database and pass the retrieved information to the display unit of

the client from which the request was made;

providing, for each of said project development phases, a set of task requirements necessary to complete each respective project development phase;

providing for each task requirement a means for determining the completion status of that requirement;

providing means for indicating the completion of each task requirement on the display unit;

providing means for electronically messaging persons responsible for said tasks;

providing gate means after each development phase which is in an open or closed state insofar as permitting the project to progress through the respective gate means, wherein each gate means is opened only when all the requirements for the given project development phase have been completed.

41. The method of claim 40, further comprising means to approve access and access levels of users to the computer.

42. The method of claim 40, further comprising means for changing the task requirements during project development.